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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE; NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/MUSTAFA

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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: MOI DG SALAMAH: HAMAS WILL NOT COLLAPSE QUICKLY

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) SUMMARY: PA Interior Ministry Director General Ibrahim Salamah told Poloff and USSC staff during a February 13 meeting that he disagreed with predictions of a rapid collapse of a HAMAS-led government. Salamah said HAMAS is capable of enduring international pressure for quite some time thanks to the support of "outsiders," especially Iran, and the willingness of Palestinians to endure hardships that would allow HAMAS to maintain control. Salamah advocated direct control of all the PA Security Forces (PASF) by the President's office and said any security role for HAMAS would lead to "civil war" because of the deep ideological and personal differences between the Fatah and HAMAS leadership. Salamah alleged that the UK had opened back-channel communications with HAMAS and expressed concerns that this would lead to official contact. END SUMMARY

HAMAS Will Not Collapse Quickly

¶2. (S) Salamah criticized the "crazy talk" emanating from high-level Fatah officials predicting that the HAMAS-led government would collapse rapidly under international political and financial pressure. Salamah said HAMAS would depend on the capacity of the Palestinian people to make sacrifices, noting that two Intifadas had accustomed the population to enduring hardships. Salamah predicted HAMAS would mobilize local financial resources from zakat committees (i.e. charities) affiliated with the movement to provide social services. Likewise, "outsiders" - Syria, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Iran - will support the movement financially.

¶3. (C) Salamah was especially apprehensive about Iranian support saying, "Iran will not allow HAMAS to fail" because of its particular strategic interests in regard to Israel. Salamah said Iran viewed HAMAS, like Lebanese Hizballah, as "insurance" against an Israeli attack on its nuclear facilities and said the Palestinian people would "pay the price" in any Israel-Iran confrontation. Pressed if Iran was capable of moving the volume of money necessary to maintain key governmental functions, Salamah replied in the affirmative, emphasizing Iran's vast energy wealth, but offered no details on the particular financial mechanisms.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: In our view, Salamah has not fully thought through the economic realities that HAMAS will face. Without tax clearances from Israel or budget support from the West, the PA will face a monthly deficit of between USD 110 and 130 million. This gap will be hard to close through sacrifice or zakat, and Iran is likely to face difficulties in moving amounts this large to the PA on a monthly basis. END COMMENT

PASF Control

15. (S) Salamah said there was disagreement between Interior Minister Nasir Yusif's office and President Abbas regarding modalities for command and control of the PASF under the new government. Salamah said the President's office was reluctant to assume direct control of all the PASF, preferring to leave some of the PASF under a weakened Ministry of Interior. Predictably, Salamah who is close to the current Interior Minister favored an arrangement in which Nasir Yusif would move to the President's office but retain his powers over the PASF. (COMMENT: Salamah's primary objective seems to be preserving Nasir Yusif's role. Our discussions with the President's office have focused on preserving control of the security forces, but without a role for Nasir Yusif. END COMMENT)

16. (C) Salamah was fiercely critical of any plan giving HAMAS a security role and demurred when asked if he felt President Abbas intended to show strong leadership on this issue. Salamah said HAMAS would "turn any security force into an army, even Civil Defense" (firemen, paramedics, etc). Likewise, Salamah said the deep personal and ideological differences between HAMAS and Fatah would lead to a "civil war" if HAMAS were given any role in security. In support of this point, Salamah recounted a colorful vignette about how he had severely beaten senior HAMAS political leader and PLC member-elect Muhammad Abu Teir with his "own hands" when the two were imprisoned together by the Israelis during the 1980s. "These people used to curse me when I came to their homes to arrest them" during PASF operations in the mid-1990s commented Salamah, implying the HAMAS leadership has similar grievances with other high-ranking security chiefs.

Fatah Needs Time to Rebuild

17. (C) Regarding Fatah, Salamah said the movement needs time to rebuild in preparation for new elections. Using an Old Testament analogy suggesting a long-term strategy, Salamah said)- with no evident irony -) that Fatah would have to "wander in the desert and prepare a new generation" before it could compete in elections. Salamah criticized PLC member-elect Muhammad Dahlan's efforts to assume leadership of Fatah following the HAMAS victory, describing Dahlan as irredeemably "corrupted in the eyes of the Palestinian people." Salamah offered no specifics about leaders he viewed as capable of leading Fatah, but said that the movement must begin looking towards grassroots leaders and rebuilding the movement's role in social services.

UK Back Channel to HAMAS?

18. (C) Salamah alleged that the UK had activated back-channel communications with HAMAS. (NOTE: Salamah is a close contact of the UK Consulate. END NOTE) Salamah said that Alastair Crooke, former EU Security Advisor, was in communication with the HAMAS leadership. Salamah viewed this negatively and described it as a preamble to more official contact. (COMMENT: We have seen other reports about Crooke's contacts with HAMAS, but no indications that he is acting on behalf of HMG. END COMMENT)

Quote in Newsweek Article

19. (C) USSC PAO provided Salamah with an advance copy of a "Newsweek" article in which Salamah is quoted suggesting that a Fatah-HAMAS civil war might be preferable to a HAMAS-led government. Salamah at first backed away from the quote saying, "I didn't say it exactly as they put," before asking apprehensively "They aren't going to publish this in

Palestine, are they?"

WALLES